

First Quarterly Report 2017: The Situation of the Media in Somaliland



Human Rights Centre
Hargeisa, Somaliland

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I Introduction

Human Rights Centre issues a report every four months on the situation of the media in Somaliland. This report covers the period from 10th December, 2016 to 31st March, 2017, during which 11 journalists and media personalities were detained.

On 19th January 2017, the Minister of Information, Osman Sahardid, warned the media not to report on any issue related to the military base that was granted by the Somaliland government to the United Arab Emirates. The Minister spoke after the Parliament, in a joint session, approved the United Arab Emirates to establish a military base at the port town of Berbera.

Table A: Number of detentions by region

Region	Number of Detentions
Hargeisa	7
Sool	1
Awdal	1
Saahil	1
Sanaag	1
Togdheer	0
Total	11

II Recommendations

To the government of Somaliland

- Stop the criminalization of the media and halt the unlawful detention and trials of journalists;
- Allow the opening of new media houses and transfers of media houses to new owners;
- Lift the ban on suspended newspapers of *Hubsad*, *Codka Shacakba* and *Haatuf*¹.

To the judiciary

- Stop the application of the Penal Code against journalists and begin the application of the Press Law and the Somaliland Constitution.

To the civil society organizations

- Support Somaliland journalists and media houses in tackling arrests and unlawful criminal prosecutions;
- Support the decriminalization of the media and advocate on behalf of the above banned newspapers.

¹ *Haatuf* was shut down on 7th April, 2014 and remains so.

III DETENTIONS

From 10th December, 2016 to 31st March, 2017, 11 journalists and media personalities were detained in Somaliland. Below are the details of the cases:

1. Khadar Saleban Maah & Mohamed Abdilahi Warsame

Khadar Saleban Maah of Universal TV, and Mohamed Abdilahi Warsame of Togaherer news website were detained at the New Hargeisa Police Station on 17th January, 2017. The two journalists were reporting on a gathering of people who included members of the Hargeisa Local Government Council all meeting at the Hargeisa Municipality main office to complain about a land dispute. The two journalists were released the same day.

2. Abdi Muridi

Abdi Muridi Ajax, a comedian and host of the satirical television program, Faaliyaha Qaranka² of Universal TV was arrested on 20th January, 2017. He was deported back to Mogadishu against his will.³

3. Mohamed Adam Jama

Mohamed Adam Jama, a Universal TV reporter based in the Garadag district of the Sanaag region, was arrested on 30th January, 2017 after he reported allegations made by residents accusing the local police of facilitating contraband. He was released on 6th February.

² <http://www.universaltvsomali.net/topics/programmes/faaliyaha-qaranka>

³ <https://goobjooge.com/dhageyso-ajakis-maareeyaha-oo-nin-madow-eh-malakul-mowd-loo-maleeyo-ah-ayaa-xiray/>

4. Luqman Mohamed Farah & Abdirahim Ahmed Mahdi,

On 8th February, 2017, Luqman Mohamed Farah and Abdirahim Ahmed Mahdi of Bulsho TV were briefly detained in Haleeya, east of Hargeisa. They were covering the complaints of water tank truck drivers over rising taxes. They were released on the same day without charges.

5. Abdimalik Mouse Oldoon,

Abdimalik Mouse Oldoon, a freelance journalist, was arrested on 15th February 2017 by the government over accusations that he supported and campaigned for a presidential candidate in the presidential election that took place in Mogadishu on 8th February.

Abdimalik was arrested after he returned from Mogadishu. On 18th February, he was brought to Hargeisa Regional Court which remanded him for seven days. On 26th February, the court ordered his detention for a further seven days. His trial started on 4th April and ended the following day with the court setting the date of the verdict as 8th April.

According to the charges submitted by the police, Abdimalik is accused of “offending the honour or prestige of the head of state”, “anti-national activity of a citizen abroad” and “publication of false news capable of disturbing the public order”.

6. Mohamed Baashe Hassan

On 20th February, 2017, about 10:30pm local time, Somaliland police arrested Mohamed Baashe Hassan, a prominent journalist and author who is currently the director of Star TV. Mohamed attended an event held at the Maansoor Hotel, Hargeisa, to commemorate the Somaliland National Youth Day marking the anniversary of the Siad Barre regime’s 1982 crackdown on students protesting the detention of educators. Mohamed had been among the students who participated in the protest.

At the event, Mohamed expressed his discontent on the manner in which the government has handled the affair of giving the United Arab Emirates permission to establish a military base in Berbera. The police arrested

Mohamed on the grounds of inciting the public and disturbing public order. He was released on bail on 25th February.

7. Abdirahman Mohamed Ege

Abdirahman Mohamed Ege was briefly arrested on 16th February, 2017 on the order of the governor of the Saahil region whilst filming government owned land that was purportedly given to private citizens. He was not charged.

10. Mohamed Shaqale Omar

Mohamed Shaqale Omar, a reporter for Somali Cable TV, was arrested on 4th March, 2017 in Laas Anod. He was released the same day without charges.

11. Ali Idiris Farah (Hagjar)

On 6th March, 2017, Ali Idiris Farah (Hagjar) of Star TV was arrested in the Sayla district of the Awdal region⁴ after he had prepared a report on building soil that is being exported to Djibouti. The regional authorities and the owners of the company exporting the soil were infuriated by the reporting and detained the journalist even before the report was aired. He was released on 9th March, 2017 without charges. He was not brought to court during his detention.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCFhTfEqSNY>

IV CASES

On 25th February, 2017, the Appeal Court in Hargeisa upheld a regional court decision that acquitted Cabdirashiid Nuur Wacays, the chairman of *Hubsad* newspaper and Siciid Khadar Cabdilaahi, the editor-in-chief. On 12th November, 2016, the Hargeisa Regional Court had acquitted the two journalists who had been accused of the publication of false news and the running of an unlicensed newspaper. However, the Office of the Attorney General had appealed against the court decision and demanded the imprisonment of the two journalists. The Appeal Court, in response, rejected the request of the prosecution office, but upheld the suspension of the newspaper. The court ruled that *Hubsad* shall not be published until the “pending registration process is fulfilled”. Both the Office of the Attorney General and the journalists have appealed to the Supreme Court regarding the suspension.

V About Human Rights Centre

Human Rights Centre (HRC) is a local human rights watchdog based in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Established in 2013, it is registered with the Somaliland government as a non-profit, non-governmental organization. HRC was formed to cover the need for advocating for human rights and to document violations, endeavoring to help maintain the advances in Somaliland's nascent democracy.

HRC strongly advocates for the freedom and independence of journalists and media houses. As such, it issues press releases, holds campaign rallies and carries out lobbying for the cause of journalists and media freedoms. HRC has also been advocating for the decriminalization of the media and the application of the Press Law. It provides legal aid to the journalists who are arrested or are under legal proceedings.

HRC is governed by a Board of Directors, the majority of whom are female human rights defenders including its deputy chairpersons and the secretary general.

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